

A Note on Arm. *išxan* ‘ruler’

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The correspondence between Arm. *išxan* “ruler” and Hitt. *ishan-* ‘id’ has long been the key-stone in the Armeno-Hittite loan theory. Surely it is a clear example of phonetic and semantic harmony between the two languages, and a correspondence that would seem difficult to dislodge. The coördination was first made by Martirosyan (1924.458-9), though he proposed not a loan correspondence, but rather a genetic origin for the Armenian word that was parallel to the development of the word in Hittite. The next year P. Jensen (1925.82) suggested the loan relationship, a view that was repeated in Yerevan by Kapantsian (1956.81, 392). This etymology has since been mentioned with some frequency in the West (Schultheiss 1961.22; Greppin 1980.204 [additional bibliography can be found in Weitenberg 1979.73]).

Hübschmann, in his *Armenische Grammatik*, ignored what might have been the obvious correspondence of Arm. *išxan* with Iranian words derived from the root **xšā-* “to rule.” His judgment, usually quite sound, was not contradicted until Benveniste (1929. 7-9) put into writing what others had perhaps suspected. Benveniste stated that Arm. *išxan* was directly from Iranian **xšāna-* by loan, a form that can be further coupled with such Middle Iranian forms as Sogd. ’*gš’wn* (**axšāvan*), the less diagnostic Kh. Saka *ššau-* “official title,” and of course NPer. *šāh* “king.” No Parthian form is known, but its lack is not crucial to Benveniste’s suggestion.

A principal difficulty with Benveniste’s etymology was the lack of any parallel in Armenian for the metathesis of MPer. *xš-* to an Arm. *išx-* or even *Všx-*. Thus Benveniste’s argument could not meet with the level of support that could be provided the Hittite correlation since problems existed on a phonetic level with the Iranian suggestion that did not exist in the Hittite parallel.

There is some fresh evidence that can be pointed to which would provide additional support for Benveniste’s suggestion, evidence which might tip the balance away from Hittite origin. Metathesis of Iran. *xš-* in a loan to Armenian can be noted in the

word Arm. *bdeašx* “proconsul, mayor, prince,” a word of Iranian provenance. The term is found in the earliest Armenian literature, from Agathangelos, Parpetsi, and Khorenatsi; in the Bible it appears four times in the reduced form *bdešx* in *Acts* 13.7, 8, 12; 18.12 where it replaces Gk. ἀνθύπτος “proconsul.” Hübschmann (AG 119-120), followed by Adjarian (*HAB*), derives *bdeašx* from Ir. *pitiaxša-, a form substantiated in Syr. *paṭaxšā*, Gk. πιτιάξης and Georgian *pitiaxši* and to which Adjarian, using later material, was able to add an attested Phl. *pātaxsāh*, in which we would see a NPer. *pādsāh* (پادشاه) “sovereign.” The form that immediately preceded Arm. *bdeašx* was, approximately, Parth. **bdiāxš(ā)*, perhaps stemming from Ir. **pati-xšāya0iya-* “ruler.”¹ That there was no metathesis in the Middle Iranian forms is clear from the Georgian and Syriac forms.

Arm. *bdeašx* provides us with clear evidence for the metathesis of **xš-* in Armenian loans. It fails, however, to tell us anything about the color of the prothetic vowel of Arm. *Všx-* (< Ir. **xš-*) since the -*a*- of Arm. *bdeašx* reflects the original Iranian vowel of Parthian **bdeaxš(ā)*. But though we cannot find a precise parallel for the initial *i-* of Arm. *išxan*, we still have an acceptable parallel for the metathesis.

There is further evidence which would tend to support a Persian origin, and that is the suffixation of the Armenian stems from the root *išx-*. Armenian has, in addition to *išxan* “ruler,” a verbal stem in *išx-*. Hittite, on the other hand, has only one stem, *ish-*, which is manifested in *išħā-* “lord” and its feminine counterpart *išħaššara-*. It is not immediately obvious how Armenian could have derived both the verbal *išxem* and the nominal *išxan* from Hittite unless the suffixation was secondary within Armenian. The situation vis-à-vis an Iranian genesis is somewhat better. Though we cannot summon up an attested MIran. *xšāna-* as opposed to *xšā-*², we can certainly argue that the root *xšā-* existed, to which the common Middle Iranian suffix -ān was added³.

Weighing our data, we can see that Hittite provides a more appropriate phonetic progenitor for the Armenian root, but is weak in explaining the suffixation. Iranian, on the other hand, provides only a moderately acceptable phonetic progenitor (though metathesis is explained, the color of the prothetic vowel is not). But Iranian evidence for the origin of the suffix -an is superior to what Hittite can provide. In balance, it would seem that Iranian origin for the Armenian stem is more appropriate.

FOOTNOTES

¹The exact etymology of the Iranian word is open to considerable discussion. An article in Altheim (1970.528-537) discusses, among other things, the rapport between the Armenian and Iranian forms, but the importance of this article is exaggerated. Other pertinent comments can be found in Frye (1956.518) and Szemerényi (1975. 354-392). The question, still undecided, about the exact form of the Proto-Iranian root does not in any way effect the Armeno-Iranian parallel, which is secure.

There is also a chance that the metathesis in Arm. išxan occurred in the Iranian period, for an ostracon discussed in Altheim (1953.16-18) seems to demonstrate, in Pahlevi, the form 'šhn:

mn 'šhn msys[t...]
kṣry hštrpl[...]

"Von dem išxan Masiš[t...]"
"Schloss des Satrapen[...]"

²The Avestan root is xšaya- 'Herr, Fürst, König'; Skt. kṣi- (kṣī-). The development of Av. xšaθra-, Skt. kṣatra- is secondary and somewhat perplexing.

³Armenian also has a productive suffix -an which is most likely an Iranian loan (Greppin 1973-74, 1975).